Interview with Kirk Dillard

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, September 29, 2009. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. It's my privilege today to be sitting across the table from Sen. Kirk Dillard. Good afternoon, Senator.

Dillard: Good afternoon, Mark. It's good to see you again.

DePue: I want to thank you at the very beginning of this for taking the time out of your busy schedule; and just to let the listening public know, in however many years they might be encountering this, you're at the beginning stages of running for governor of the state of Illinois yourself.

Dillard: I am, and it's an odyssey, but this a nice break from the day-to-day rigors of running for governor in a big state like Illinois.

DePue: We'll probably have two of these sessions. Today we're going to start with your background and certainly talk quite a bit about your time working with Governor Jim Thompson, who is worthy of study in and of himself, as well. In probably the second session we have, we'll really get into the experiences with Jim Edgar. This is part of the Jim Edgar project; I should say that, as well. But let's start at the very beginning, and you tell us when and where you were born.

Dillard: I was born on June 1, 1955, in Chicago, at Illinois Masonic Hospital, which is just a couple of blocks from Wrigley Field.

DePue: Well, that pretty much places it for anybody who knows where Wrigley Field is. Wrigleyville!

Dillard: Wrigleyville, near north side of Chicago.

DePue: Do you know how long the family had been living in the Chicago area?

Dillard: My father's family was from downstate Illinois—Kampsville, Beardstown; in that area—and my father was born in the city of Chicago; my grandfather and grandmother both came up from downstate Illinois to the city of Chicago. Through the Depression they owned restaurants so they never starved for food. So my dad was a city kid—went to the Chicago public schools and Chicago public high schools. My father was an all-city baseball player who actually went on and played in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization for a while. And my mother hails from Kentucky, from Madisonville or northern Kentucky. She came to Chicago to go to the Cook County School of Nursing. My mom was part of a big farm family in Kentucky: nine brothers and sisters. Most of the brothers became miners, and my mom came up here, again, to be a nurse. My mom and dad met at DePaul University, under the elevated tracks, as I like to call it, in Chicago, and I went to law school at DePaul University. So I tell people that without DePaul University, my mom and dad never would have met and I'd never be here.

DePue: What did your father do for a living?

Dillard: My father is a high school teacher. He started in the city of Chicago, and then we moved out to the town of Hinsdale, in DuPage County. My father got tired of a reverse commute on what's known as the Eisenhower Expressway, and I was lucky to be raised in the western suburbs of Chicago during the greatest expansion period in American history, where the suburbs were sort of created. So I grew up during a tremendous, magical time of suburban growth in the western suburbs of Chicago.

DePue: You make it sound great to grow up during that timeframe, but I would imagine you've got interstates popping up all over the place and construction that's causing some disruption, at least.

Dillard: Well, it's been wild to see the suburbs grow. They started to grow when I was a young child. The World War II generation was starting to build. I was born in '55, but you had a tremendous growth of suburbia. Now I'm a State Senator, and I get to see some of the areas, what's left of places like northeastern Will County and southwestern DuPage County, Naperville, Bolingbrook—places like that—where they have tremendous growth going on. Hinsdale, the town I grew up in, was a relatively old suburb, and so we didn't have a lot of growth in that actual suburb where I was. Most of the

homes were older homes; but starting about 1980, Hinsdale started to have what is known as the teardown craze, where they were tearing down homes that might be eighty to a hundred years old and replacing them with bigger, more modern homes—outrageously priced homes I might add (laughter)—on these lots. So I grew up in a town that was relatively stable; really the big growth area in Hinsdale, population fifteen or sixteen thousand, was the teardown craze in the 1980s.

DePue: That's well ahead of our storyline right now.

Dillard: We'll catch up!

DePue: When did you move from Chicago? How old were you when you moved from Chicago to Hinsdale?

Dillard: I was six years old. We had an intermediate stop in a village called River Grove, in Cook County, Leyden Township. And it was interesting: in the city of Chicago, where I lived for the first couple years of my life, my grandparents lived in a three flat with us. Then when we moved to River Grove my grandparents bought a house right next to ours—new construction—but it didn't take my dad long to get tired of that. Again, the commute was on the Eisenhower Expressway, whether we lived in the city of Chicago near Wrigley Field, where the Cubs play, or in River Grove. Eventually we bought a house in Hinsdale in late 1961, a ranch style home. So early 1960s is when I really settled down in the village of Hinsdale, where I live today with my wife and children.

DePue: There was a lot of movement out of Chicago during that timeframe. Did your parents ever get into too much of a discussion of why they moved, beyond the commute?

Dillard: Basically in those days, people moved to be closer to their jobs. May not be much different than why people move today, although some people today would move for better schools, and perhaps the physical safety if there were street gangs or crime in their neighborhood in a more urban area. But my mom and dad moved because my dad wanted to be close to the high school where he taught. He was a freshman baseball coach, so he put in a lot of long hours late at night coaching baseball. My dad wanted to be five minutes from the high school, not an hour or so.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about what life was like for you growing up then.

Dillard: It was funny you should ask that. I just was kidding with one of my two sisters yesterday that we were lucky to be born and live in what I think is the greatest age in American history. You left your doors unlocked. I just had my daughters out selling lemonade and I've got to watch them. It was a different world in the 1960s and 1970s in suburban Chicago. You just trusted people more and there didn't seem to be as many kooks, so to speak, that were out

there, that you had to lock your doors for or constantly watch your children when they're playing in your yard. It was a very good time. There was that show *Leave It To Beaver*. It wasn't quite like *Leave It To Beaver*, but it was closer to *Leave It To Beaver* than it might be in 2009, when we're sitting here recording this.

DePue: There was no Eddie Haskell in your life?[1]

Dillard: There were lots of Eddie Haskells in my life; (laughter) for purposes of this I won't mention who they are, but I remember the Eddie Haskells very well! In fact, I just saw my third grade teacher the other day, and I mentioned one child's name, and believe me, he was the Eddie Haskell of our class!

DePue: Was church a part of the equation when you grew up?

Dillard: It was. My mom taught Sunday school at the Union Church of Hinsdale. I still have—and got sworn into the state Senate—with a Bible I was given by Mrs. Grant Keller, my second grade Sunday school teacher; and so my mom taught Sunday school, growing up. I sang in the choir. I played in the hand bell choir at the Union Church of Hinsdale, which is still a beautiful old church right downtown in Hinsdale, so…

DePue: What's the denomination?

Dillard: It is United Church of Christ. My mother grew up, as I said before, in Kentucky. She was a Baptist, probably by training or religious upbringing, and my father was actually Catholic, but the Union Church of Hinsdale—a very good sort of non-denominational (unintelligible)… United Church of Christ had people from all different denominations, and it really is, in Hinsdale, sort of one of the focal points of the two or three big churches in town, and it is still today. I go to a different church; I go to Christ Church of Oak Brook, which is right up the street from Hinsdale and a bigger church, but the Union Church of Hinsdale continues to be a major, awesome… I still go to meetings and other things there. A great congregation; very much part of the Hinsdale fabric.

DePue: Did your father attend church with you?

Dillard: My dad was not… He would. He was an Easter and Christmas guy, where my mother was every week; so my mom was religious, my father not so.

DePue: Could you think of who were the stronger influences that you had when you were growing up.

[1] *Leave it to Beaver* was a popular television sitcom in the 1950s and 1960s, centered on the family life of Theodore "Beaver" Cleaver. Eddie Haskell, the best friend of Beaver's older brother, was a frequent tormentor of Beaver.

Dillard: Without a doubt, my grandparents were unbelievably strong influences in my life. Up until I was seven, when we really moved out to Hinsdale, Grandma and Grandpa—Grandpa Wally and Grandma Gerber we called her, Edith Gerber—

DePue: And were they Dillards?

Dillard: They were. That is my father's set of… My grandmother remarried about the time my mom and dad got married in the early 1950s. My grandfather Dillard divorced my grandmother. Divorce was pretty rare, I think, in the 1950s, but he moved out to Ventura, California—opened a couple of McDonald's. He was remarried, so really the grandfather on my father's side that I knew, was this great German immigrant, Walter Gerber, who lived right in the Wrigleyville neighborhood; who met my grandmother, Edith Gerber, who grew up in downstate Illinois, on a farm. My Grandfather Wally and my grandmother, Edith Gerber, were tremendous influences on me. They lived next door. They taught me how to read. Grandfather Wally was my idol. He called me pal, and he never had children of his own; so while he had other grandchildren, I lived next door and I was like his son. I still remember raking leaves with him and going to get the *Chicago Tribune* with him, and he'd always buy me a chocolate donut at some store in Elmwood Park on North Avenue. Mystical moments. Obviously my mom and dad were great influences on me, and I had lots of teachers. My teachers: it didn't matter what grade I was in, I idolized every teacher I ever had in grade school.

DePue: What were your parents' names?

Dillard: My parents' names were Edward Floyd Dillard Jr.—his father was obviously Edward F. Dillard Sr.—and my mother was Martina Raye, R-a-y-e, Whitfield. My mother kind of goes by the name Martye, M-a-r-t-y-e, so Ed and Martye Dillard; and they are, as we cut this in 2009, still in the house that we moved to in 1962, in Hinsdale. They're in their 80s, God bless 'em, and still living in that house, and it's great to have… Both my sisters and their families live nearby, Clarendon Hills, Illinois, and Westmont. We live in Hinsdale. It's nice to have Mom and Dad literally less than five minutes away.

DePue: Two sisters.

Dillard: Two sisters.

DePue: Where did you fall under the scheme here?

Dillard: I'm an oldest child, which makes me right, the smartest, the best, the most overachieving. I'm laughing as I say this, if the listeners can't tell. I was six years old when my first sister, Kimberly, was born, and I was eight years old when my sister Karen was born in 1963.

DePue: You were old enough to have some separation, so I would imagine you had friends around the neighborhood you played with more than little sisters.

Dillard: Absolutely, and it was nice. I wanted both my sisters to be born so I was ready for sisters. I thought it was pretty cool. But I had lots of friends in the neighborhood when we lived in River Grove, when I was like from three to age six, lots of buddies—Joey Coppage and guys that I would play with out in the streets. We played wiffleball and it was a neat time. Lot of swing sets in those days, and people's backyards—you just ran from backyard to backyard. You rode your bikes in the street, and you went down to the local school. It was a time when your mom and dad would let you run loose and not be afraid like you might be today.[2]

DePue: Where did you attend high school?

Dillard: Very proudly I went to Hinsdale Central High School in Hinsdale, Illinois, one of the great suburban high schools in Chicago, both academically and athletically. I was just kidding somebody from New Trier High School that Hinsdale Central ranks second in the number of state championships in athletics won in the history of the state of Illinois, but we are always generally in the top three to four high schools in Illinois in academics and ACT scores, as well. My father taught at Hinsdale Central. He was a history teacher, social studies teacher, and the freshman baseball coach, so I went to high school—I always tell high school students, when I go back and see them in the classes, "If you think it's tough, try having a father that's a teacher in the same school you go to. You can't get away with anything!"

DePue: Yeah, you had to behave yourself!

Dillard: You had to behave yourself.

DePue: When you were in high school, what were you thinking you wanted to do with your life?

Dillard: I wanted to be a doctor. My mother was a registered nurse, a surgical nurse at Hines Veterans Hospital in Maywood, and I always wanted to be a surgeon. And when I went away to college I also was a pre-med major, so I always envisioned myself being a general surgeon in a suburban hospital, and would love to be that today.

DePue: Something happened in the interim that we'll get to, I'm sure. (laughter) Tell us about, then, the decision to go to college. Where and why?

[2] Bikes and wiffleball were also staples of Jim Edgar's childhood. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 21, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL, 43-44 [All interviews cited below are part of this project, unless otherwise indicated]; Fred Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, April 22, 2009, 33-34.

Dillard: College was interesting. I wanted to play baseball, and I needed a university that would allow me to walk on as a baseball player and receive a scholarship. I remember looking at certain universities, but went down to Macomb, Illinois, to Western Illinois University—a beautiful spring day. The sun was out, the students were riding their bicycles around, and Western has a main administration building from the 1890s with a golden dome on top that sort of looks like the University of Notre Dame's golden dome, and it was mystical. It was everything that I thought a midwestern college should look like. The atmosphere was good.

Actually, it's ironic, it's a small world: my grandparents continue to live in River Grove, Illinois, in the house that they had when we lived next door to them. The people who bought our old house in River Grove, the DeSalvo family, their son Steve—I would go visit my grandparents, and we'd play when I was there in seventh and eighth grade and high school; we'd play wiffle ball out in the alley. He went to Western Illinois University, so I knew somebody who went to school there. Plus there were a lot of ties to Hinsdale Central High School with WIU Athletics. Our athletic director, a man named Gene Strode, football coach, went to Western Illinois University. Lots of ties, including a couple of football players—Bobby Harding, Bill Huskisson. There were guys who went to Western Illinois University that I knew from high school. But I went to WIU, just hit it on a mystical day, thought I could walk on and play baseball there, and that's how I selected my college. Life is full of things, but I remain very active with WIU today, and it was absolutely the perfect place for me to go to college. A great faculty. Even though we had about 16,500 students it felt like a small university, and I remain friends with administrators and faculty members and people I met there. It's a major part of my life.

DePue: A lot of people from Chicago end up at places like Western and Southern, in part because it's far enough from Chicago that you can spread your wings.

Dillard: That really wasn't my motivation. I looked at Northern Illinois University and don't know why I didn't go there. It's a great place, and the more I know about Northern the more I like it. Eastern wasn't on the radar screen. I became very familiar with Eastern Illinois University through Governor Edgar, my boss for many years, and Eastern is a great place. Knew a little bit about Southern Illinois University. Carbondale was a little bit far away, and Western was probably four hours, in those days, from my house in Hinsdale. Today with roads, some of which I take pride in having widened, it now probably takes three and a half hours to get to Macomb, three hours and twenty minutes, so it's much more tolerable to get there. But no, it was just a magical campus, perfect time. This is what I think, at age seventeen, a university should look like, and with a chance to walk on to play baseball at a good baseball program.

DePue: Was baseball the reason why you didn't want to go to a small, private college?

Dillard: Couldn't afford a smaller private college. I might've, if I'd figured out how to fill out the financial aid forms, been able to make it work. My mom was a nurse at a veteran's hospital and my dad was a schoolteacher. Funding was an issue, not **the** issue. My mom and dad gave us everything—all three of their children—everything we ever wanted, so money wasn't an issue, but it was an issue. Why wouldn't I go to a state school if I was happy there, especially since the tuition was less?

DePue: You mentioned baseball a couple times in this equation. Did you ever flirt with the notion that maybe you could develop into a good enough ballplayer that you could follow along in your father's footsteps?

Dillard: Yes. I knew my dad was a great baseball player. He played at the AAA level for the Pittsburgh Pirates.

DePue: What position?

Dillard: He played second base, and they had a guy named Bill Mazeroski, quite a famous baseball player. My guess is that it's like playing against Ryan Sandberg, or Joe Morgan if you're the Cincinnati Reds; my father was somewhat limited in his access, but my dad was a great baseball player.

But going to Western—I got there, I walked on, I played fall baseball the first year, very good baseball program; but you get there and suddenly you see, wow, these guys are a lot faster than I am, they're stronger than I am. I could hit well. I didn't have a lot of speed at foot—and speed was an issue. I ran like I had a piano on my back, (laughter) and it just doesn't cut it at that level. And then the bottom line is—I've said I was a pre-med major—getting on a bus traveling to Iowa or going through a major college athletic program takes away from your laboratory courses and your study time, and it didn't take me long to realize, wow, this is going to be really hard to play baseball. You're never going to play pro baseball. So I'd come back, I'd play baseball in the summers—I played a lot of softball—and I just said I'm never going to be a pro baseball player, I'd better concentrate on my studies. So that's what I was doing in the early years, a couple years, at WIU.

DePue: I asked about your father, so I have to ask what position you played.

Dillard: I played third base. In college I was trying to play third base. I played second base a lot, and in high school I was a pitcher. I was a two-time letterman in high school, and I'd pitch and play third base or second base in high school.

DePue: But you did mention that you changed gears and really focused in on the pre-med major.

Dillard: It was interesting because the epiphany came during the Watergate era of Richard Nixon's impeachment trial; and thinking I want to be a doctor, I really never thought about political science or law school, but the Watergate

era's going on. It's 1973ish, 1974, and there was a professor that I took for introductory political science named Donald Marshall, Professor Don Marshall—and just a level 100 class in political science He was a former aide to Congressman Tom Railsback; Tom Railsback was a key player in the impeachment of Richard Nixon, or leading up to the resignation of Richard Nixon. He was the local congressman from Macomb where I was going to school, so I'm sitting there right in the middle of these historic proceedings. Professor Marshall was a tremendous lecturer, and he made it all come alive. Suddenly I said, "Wow, I like this political science stuff." And I had a history teacher—it was Professor Egler, two semesters of the Civil War—and I thought, Wow, I like this history, I like this political science, I like this government stuff. Suddenly I said, "I think I might want to be a lawyer rather than a doctor. This is really, really great stuff."

Then I also got involved in student government, and through student government I liked the student senate. I became the student board member on the board of governors at state colleges, at universities; and suddenly my interest became much more government oriented than medically oriented. I was the president of my fraternity house, the largest fraternity at Western Illinois University, Delta Sigma Phi, and I had that honor twice. So the two-year president of the largest fraternity house on campus while I was a student member of the board of governors, very involved in student activities. And I'm proud to say that when I graduated WIU, I was the recipient of both the Outstanding Fraternity Presidents' award of the university and the WIU Man of the Year my senior year at a big assembly in the University Union Grand Ballroom. So yeah, I was a student leader at WIU, and it helped me evolve into the person that became Governor Edgar's chief of staff or a state senator, or today a candidate for governor. Those leadership skills I developed in the middle of a cornfield at a university called Western Illinois, a profound impact on my life.

DePue: This is a very impolite question. It wasn't too long after you graduated that *Animal House* came out, and (laughter) everybody's perception what it was like to be in a fraternity in a college—and Western had a reputation of being a little bit of a party school, as well.

Dillard: It was clearly a party school during my era there. It's much more subdued today, but I think all universities in the 1970s were pretty raucous and wild. It was a strange time. Alcohol was starting to be allowed on campus. Alcohol was allowed in the dormitories after my freshman year, and yes, we had a guy ride a motorcycle right in the basement of my fraternity house, (laughter) just like the *Animal House* movie! So I always kid my wife and others, I lived *Animal House* in reality, although I was the president so I tried to keep it from completely deteriorating. Our frat house still stands there today. It burned down recently. We rebuilt it. A one million dollar reconstruction project in Macomb is a pretty doggone big house.

It's amazing the number of leaders who came out of that system in Macomb. During my era at WIU, I think it's important to note that Paul Vallas, the former CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, was there. Mary Matalin, who was a regular on *Meet the Press*—she's married to James Carville, the political operative; she's an author—Mary Matalin was there. Also, Tim Mapes, who was Speaker Madigan's chief of staff, was at WIU during that time period, and the list goes on and on and on. Bob Nardelli is the chairman of the Chrysler Corporation. He's a little older than me. He made Home Depot into what it is. He was the former number two person at General Electric Corporation. He was a WIU football player during my era, and the list goes on. Eric Gleacher—little older than me; the University of Chicago Gleacher Center for Business in downtown Chicago—Eric Gleacher started out at Western Illinois University. So a lot of prominent people. Dan Webb, the great trial lawyer, is from Bushnell, Illinois, a suburb of Macomb. A lot of great people are being produced by not only Western Illinois University, but all our universities, and leaders in academia and education, the business community, and athletics, as well. It's amazing what our universities in this state produce. It's a wise investment.

DePue: I want to go back to that important decision of getting away from pre-med and into government and politics, and eventually perhaps going to law school. You went from the hard sciences to the social sciences, and that's a big change in and of itself.

Dillard: A huge change, especially in the way you prepare and the way you study, but I'm a Gemini and I have an ability to feel very comfortable in a laboratory setting and then go over to the social sciences. And in fact, it's funny—as a lawyer, I was a product liability lawyer, and while I was a defense trial lawyer I loved working with the scientists and the engineers, so I am a latent scientist, still want-to-be today. I find engineering, mathematics, and science just fascinating as can be. I still find medicine as fascinating as can be, and, literally, I think that just comes with my personality, that I feel comfortable. Maybe why I'm a good, decent politician is I feel comfortable and have a genuine interest in so many things. It keeps me from ever getting bored in life, I'll tell you that!

DePue: (laughter) Did your parents support your career aspiration changes?

Dillard: My mom and dad never pushed me one way or the other. They were there if I needed them but they never pushed me in any direction at all. I think they were clearly happy that if I wasn't going to go to medical school, I was going to go to law school. Lawyers in our profession have fallen a little bit from the 1970s in terms of reputation, but no, I think my mom and dad were really proud that I went off and became a lawyer. I know they were very proud when I ended up at a pretty prestigious law firm, Lord, Bissell & Brook—now known as Locke, Lord, Bissell & Liddell since we've merged with a gigantic

Texas firm. But I never would have thought I would ever be able to practice law at a law firm of my level.

DePue: You got interested in American politics at a time when a lot of people, especially people of our generation, became very cynical about and were turned off by politics. So explain what excited you or interested you at the same timeframe.

Dillard: Congressman Railsback, a Republican, was not necessarily toeing the party line for the Richard Nixon White House, so I saw a very unique man of integrity. I watched him, and I thought, Wow, this is a gutsy guy who can take on his own party and do what he thinks is best for America. And then there was also a congressman who represented that area for a while—I knew his history and his past—and that was Congressman Paul Finley who was over from more of the Jacksonville area. So I was very lucky, just sitting there as a nineteen, twenty year old kid, to have a couple of very independent Republican congressmen who I thought were people of great integrity. And they were, so they gave me a good taste in a very bad-tasting era of American politics.

All politics is local. The general assembly might have, like the United States Congress, a very low approval rating, but if you generally ask your people "Do you like your local congressman? Do you like your local state senator?" the answer is going to be "Yeah, I don't like the Congress or general assembly but I like my own person." It's sort of like lawyers: most people don't like lawyers but they generally like their own lawyer. So that's what makes, I guess, the world go round.

DePue: You also grew up during a time—you were in high school, at least—at the tail end of the Vietnam War. These are very political times, as well. Now that you decided, okay, this is an interesting career path to pursue, how would you describe your own personal political philosophy at the time?

Dillard: I had a draft number of three, I think. It was a very low, low number. I remember my grandmother was all apoplectic when she saw—they do the draft on TV. These young people today, I don't think they realize that it was like Vanna White.[3] They were drawing lottery balls out; somebody shook them up, and birthdays were on these balls, and that's how you got your draft number. I graduated high school in '73—I'm in the very last group of men that ever had their lottery taken for the Vietnam War, but it was clear to me that the war was winding down. As I look back on it, at eighteen or seventeen my guess is there would have been some kind of college deferment, but I didn't know any better. My father and my two uncles were all drafted. My grandfather was drafted, and I never thought much about it. You're sort of,

[3] White is a co-host of the television game show *Wheel of Fortune*, whose duties include revealing the letters guessed by contestants.

when you're age seventeen, fearless anyway, and my guess is I would have gone off to college and not been part of the draft. But I wouldn't have had a problem if I was drafted at seventeen; two years of my—very different than it is today, or later.

I will say one thing that's missing. It's going to be a little different now that we are in a Middle East conflict where we have very courageous—I just talked to one on the phone a little while ago—men and women coming back from Baghdad and from Afghanistan, but we had a lot of Vietnam vets running around Western's campus. There was a veterans club, and they were a little older. They generally had longer hair, and it was interesting to see people's reaction, because most of these people were very proud, as they should be. A lot of times they would wear their Army jacket with their name on the pocket, and some students were sort of stand-offish. WIU, Macomb, Illinois, wasn't a radical place. It wasn't the University of Cal - Berkeley or Wisconsin. They had protests but it wasn't really a radical place, and we generally treated our veterans with respect. But it was very nice to have, literally, a lot of veterans who came back. I think it made the campus better. It made some of us be a little more serious, thinking, Yeah, we're off playing in Macomb, we're in college, but boy, these guys were just over in Vietnam; I think it made the campus much better and stronger to have these veterans. Most of them were pretty good students. They were more mature than most of us, and I thought it was also great that our government gave them the GI Bill,[4] since they gave up years of their lives to serve us. I always thought it was pretty neat. I still think it's great. The GI Bill is one thing that's worked well in this country, and it was nice to have veterans from Vietnam running around campus, when I was an eighteen- and nineteen-year-old young man off in the middle of a cornfield.

DePue: I know the reputation of Western today, at least, and for as long as I can remember it's got a very strong law enforcement administration program and also a pretty large and active ROTC[5] program there.

Dillard: Absolutely. The law enforcement program at WIU may be America's finest law enforcement program. And a young man—as I run for governor, as we sit here today—is a recent ROTC graduate of WIU. He's the former student body president, but he was a ROTC person at WIU, and Western has a very strong ROTC program. And I just read what was called the *Western News*, which is our alumni paper, and saw some pictures of WIU alumni serving very valiantly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

[4] The GI Bill was established during World War II to provide the means for veterans to attend college on their return to prepare them for jobs in a new kind of world and job market. The program was continued long after the war.

[5] ROTC: Reserve Officer Training Corps was a program to train college students for positions of military leadership; tuition was provided for a variety of courses, and the students were expected to serve in the reserve corps of the service upon completion.

DePue: Did you have any aspirations for running for office when you were still in college? A fraternity president—you said you got involved in school politics, if you will…

Dillard: None. I wasn't political at all; I wasn't in the College Republicans. I think I was a Republican because Tom Railsback and all the people elected locally in Macomb were Republican. I applied for the legislative staff internship program; in those days it was through Sangamon State University, now known as the University of Illinois at Springfield. I applied for this intern program. I'd applied to law schools, but a graduate teaching assistant named Neil Flynn had completed that program and he said, "This is a great program, you should try this out." There was a Professor Burton Southard, who was sort of Mary Matalin's—of the Bush White House's fame—Burt Southard was her mentor, as well, and he said, "You should do this legislative staff internship program for a year. Then you can go to law school."[6]

I applied, and it was funny—I remember at my interview for this program I drove over to Springfield in my yellow 1969—I think it was—LeMans. So I drive over to Springfield. I remember I had to buy a suit; I didn't own a suit. I owned a sport coat, but I bought my first suit at Herbert's Menswear in Macomb. I put on my best blue polyester suit from that era—yes, there was polyester in those days. And I remember they said at my interview, "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?" My answer was, "I grew up in DuPage County and I go to school in Macomb, so I guess that probably means that I'm a Republican," and a few people laughed in the room. But I didn't have a gigantic ideology, although I would say I was conservative, having grown up in the Chicago suburbs. My dad was pretty conservative, but all politics is local, and when you were in Macomb in the 1970s and you grew up in DuPage County, Illinois, even if it's today, you're basically a Republican, and that was my answer. So they instantly said, "Okay, then you should interview with the Republican staffs," and after they initially screened me they pushed me over to that. They said, "Do you want to work in the House or the Senate?" The House was scary to me because it was so big, and the Senate was smaller, so I said "I'd like to work in the Senate." So that's how I became a Senate Republican intern.

DePue: What did you do while you were there?

[6] Mary Matalin, a native of Calumet City, Illinois, is a Republican political consultant who served as chief of staff to Republican National Committee chairman Lee Atwater from 1988 until his death in 1991; as a political director on both of George H.W. Bush's presidential campaigns; and as an assistant to George W. Bush and counselor to Dick Cheney from 2000 to 2002. She is also noted for marrying her Democratic rival, James Carville, in 1993. "Mary Matalin," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Matalin. The Illinois Legislative Staff Internship Program also gave Governor Edgar, Carter Hendren, Allen Grosboll, and Terry Scrogum, their start in Illinois government. "Samuel K. Gove Hall of Fame," Institute for Legal, Legislative and Policy Studies, University of Illinois at Springfield, http://cspl.uis.edu/ILLAPS/ILSIP/SamuelKGoveHallofFAme.htm.

Dillard: As a Senate Republican intern I was assigned to education-type matters and some appropriations. The leader was Sen. David Shapiro from Amboy, Illinois. Doc Shapiro was a dentist, a very wonderfully nice man; really, a citizen legislator who on Thursdays, when the legislature would adjourn, would run back to Amboy and drill teeth, as he said. Doc was not a politician. He was a dentist first and just a wonderful man who died way too young from cancer.[7] I stayed a second year after the internship because the position to staff the education committee came open; so I became a full-time staffer for a year because a man named Dr. David Elder went off to become the executive director of the School Problems Commission. So two years out of Western Illinois University, I am staffing, by myself, the higher education and the education committees in the state Senate; and that was something I loved. But then I went to law school right after that because I didn't want to defer law school any farther. I was probably pushing the ripe old age of about twenty-five in those days, but wanted to go to law school. Went to law school full time at DePaul University in Chicago, and I lived in my mother and father's basement.

DePue: When did you start at DePaul?

Dillard: I started DePaul in the fall of 1979. I rode the commuter train in, and there was another young man from Hinsdale who was doing that, as well. He was living with his parents, and I lived in sort of a two bedroom suite with my own bathroom, in the basement of my parents' house—rode the commuter train 'cause it held down the cost. I wasn't going to socialize much anyway in law school, so it was okay living with Mom and Dad, and the price was right. I took the train every day to downtown Chicago for three years, to law school.

DePue: I want to go back to your timeframe when you were working in the legislature with Shapiro. I don't want to mischaracterize him, but my understanding is—I think you alluded to it already—David Shapiro was not one of the people most would consider a very effective legislator.

Dillard: Oh, I don't know. I was really young, so I wasn't into the power or politics as much as I was just kind of tracking education legislation. Doc got sick, and so that clearly, I think, lowered his ability to be a real tremendously dynamic leader. But Jim Thompson and he were close. Clearly, Doc was Jim Thompson's leader in the state Senate in some very early and good years. The Northern Illinois University law school, I believe, is named after Senator Shapiro.[8] But Doc was tragically stricken with cancer and that slowed him down. Was he a powerhouse like Speaker Madigan or former Senate president Phil Rock? No. But I don't think that was Doc's nature. Doc's strength was a

[7] Shapiro, a Republican from Amboy, first entered the General Assembly as a representative in 1968, and served as Senate minority leader from December 1976 until his death August 1, 1981. *Chicago Tribune*, August 2, 1981, 1.Carter Hendren, interview by Mark DePue, April 28, 2009, 13-14. Also see, Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, 63-65, for an anecdote about the only time Edgar saw Shapiro lose his temper.
[8] Northern Illinois University named its law library in honor of Shapiro.

very calming, cool influence; citizen legislator, which is what everybody ought to be about; he wasn't a dynamic, flashy personality. But Doc was, let me tell you, substantively solid. The man would be in his office early in the mornings preparing, and he would stay late at night, and he always did his homework. I think Doc was a very fine Senate minority leader.

DePue: You could've gone straight to law school out of Western, and you talked very briefly about why you went down to be a legislative intern.

Dillard: I thought it would behoove me and make me a better lawyer and law student to do this. I thought the experience would be great, and [I was] a little captivated with Springfield because I was a student member on the board of governors of state colleges and universities. We would meet several times a year in Springfield. Although I wasn't a political person, I thought it would make me a better lawyer and a better law student to see how the legislature worked for a year or two before I went off to law school; it did help me as a law student to have watched the legislature and the governor make laws for a couple of years. It made me a better law student to have actually experienced that. And while the professors were talking this esoteric theory, I'd actually seen how it worked for a couple years, and it made me a much better student. And for once, my assumptions were right! (laughter)

DePue: You mean they weren't always right?

Dillard: They weren't always right, but…

DePue: We don't have to pursue that one!

Dillard: But I always tell people, if you have a year or two and—depends: I was single, I didn't have any children—you can put off a couple years, it doesn't hurt you to put off law school for a couple years. But I always warn them—and I'm very proud of myself, that I was able to walk away—because they said, "Well, how about a raise? Stay a third year." And I said, "No, I want to go to law school," and I was able to break away. It was tough. I had mixed feelings, but I knew what I had to do, and that was to go to law school.

DePue: Law school is a means to an end, if you will. What did you see as your career goals while you were in that timeframe, just ready to go to law school?

Dillard: There were two things I thought I wanted to do out of law school. I wanted to be a prosecutor, a US attorney-type like Governor Jim Thompson was, so I thought I was going to be a prosecutor. The other alternative I thought was, Maybe I'll go off and do municipal or school law or finance. So I went to law school, and my classes were concentrated in criminal law or school law, municipal finance, where I could be a bond lawyer at a big law firm like Chapman & Cutler that does lots of school and local government finance. I interviewed with that law firm; they still are the major financial firms that most cities and states use in the Midwest.

But I interviewed with the U.S. attorney's office, and the story is that somebody I had met when I worked as that intern in the Senate became Jim Thompson's legislative director and said, "Why don't you come and work for Jim Thompson? We're going to be in an election year. Work for Governor Thompson for a couple years. You can always go to work for one of those big law firms." And that's sort of at the end of law school. Rather than going to be a U.S. attorney or a municipal bond lawyer, I went off and worked for Gov. Jim Thompson, which was probably how I got fully immersed into politics.

I started to work for Jim Thompson in 1981, my final semester of law school. I took classes on Fridays and Saturday mornings. It was set up where I could go to school from 7:00 a.m. on Fridays—and I had a night class, so 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Fridays—and I took Trial Techniques on Saturday morning. I was able to work for Jim Thompson four days a week and then go to law school on Fridays and Saturday mornings to finish up that last semester; then we were in a full-blown legislative session. The sessions ended on June thirtieth in those days, not in May, and I put off taking the bar until the February bar exam so that I could be around the general assembly full-time, working for Governor Thompson. So I took the February bar, passed it on my first try—I guess that would be February of 1982—and then I worked for Jim Thompson for about a year as his liaison to the state Senate; then I was for six years his director of legislative affairs.

DePue: I'm going to take a couple steps back again and ask you one more question about the internship and then getting into college. Did your political views evolve during that internship? Did you have some mentors in that respect?

Dillard: No doubt about it. My mentors while I worked for the Senate Republican staff were Timothy Campbell—he was from Jacksonville, Illinois—who later became chief of staff… Tim [was a] very prim and proper conservative Republican from Jacksonville, Illinois—chief of staff. Two men: John Washburn, who was the gentleman who got me to go to work eventually for Jim Thompson. John went over and worked for Jim Thompson after his time in the state Senate. John Washburn was the appropriations director of the Senate Republicans— conservative, fiscal conservative, Republican, still one of my best friends, saw him yesterday at my golf outing. John is now sixty years old and runs the state medical society's insurance company; but still a mentor, great friend. And then a man who passed away way too soon, Roger Sweet. Roger was a decorated, wounded-in-Vietnam Marine, bigger-than-life guy; just a great big guy who grew up in Springfield, went to Springfield High School. Roger Sweet was a conservative Republican.

These three guys, all about ten years older than me, showed me that you want to be a conservative, especially on the fiscal side, Republican. They were very nice people, and they made me philosophically a conservative Republican. Just great men with great ideals, and those were sort of the three people who brought me along on the conservative Republican side, along with

Senator Dave Shapiro, the minority leader who kind of reminded me of my father. I listened to my dad, and I listened to Doc Shapiro, another conservative Republican; and pro-business, pro-private sector guys.

DePue: How closely were you watching what was going on in the Republican Party at the national level? Because this is during a timeframe when Reagan is gaining more prominence; when Carter's having some challenges in his administration…

Dillard: I watched the federal a little bit… Ronald Reagan, I liked. Everybody liked him. He actually sort of looked physically like my grandfather, and he was also from Illinois; I knew and took great pride—like I do in Abraham Lincoln or people who are from Illinois—I knew Ronald Reagan was from Illinois. The other thing that made me take an interest in Reagan is, in 1976, when I was a student at WIU, I got to meet Ronald Reagan. He came to WIU. I remember meeting him in a loading dock at the University Union building, shook his hand—should have had my picture taken with him in those days; I wasn't thinking of the value of having the memory of meeting Ronald Reagan. I remember talking to him about playing football at Eureka College against Western Illinois State Teacher's College—which later became Western Illinois University— in those days, and I remember the President pointed to exactly where he knew the football field was. Western has a different football stadium today, but President Reagan knew where in the world that place was, and he goes, "That's where we played." He sort of laughed about, maybe it was leather helmets in those days or whatever; charming man, vintage Ronald Reagan. I'm just some nineteen-year-old gangly kid, but talking about Eureka College, playing WIU, knew where the football field was, and mystical. So I watched Ronald Reagan because he was from Illinois, and I once actually physically saw the guy in Macomb, Illinois.

DePue: Of course, he was not president at that time, he was just a candidate; the former governor of California running against the sitting president, Gerald Ford. So I'll put you on the spot here, Senator. Who did you vote for in the primary, Ford or Reagan?

Dillard: It's a good question. I voted for Jerry Ford because he was the sitting, incumbent president. As much as I liked Reagan, I thought he should probably let Jerry Ford serve his… In fact, I remember I wanted Reagan to be the vice-presidential nominee. I thought that would be a good ticket, but I thought Ronald Reagan would be a good president four years down the road. President Ford just passed away within the last eighteen months or so. They made fun of him on *Saturday Night Live*, but he was a pretty good, solid, healing president. But I idolized Ronald Reagan. I don't have a bust of Jerry Ford in my office; I have a bust of Ronald Reagan in my office.

History has a way of working itself out, and the world is a much better place because Ronald Reagan was the president, and Ford went on to lose. I

think Ronald Reagan probably would have won that race, but I was a novice in politics in those days. I still thought you shouldn't be running against the sitting incumbent President who I think is doing a good job.

DePue: You described yourself at this timeframe as a fiscal conservative. How about on social issues? Where would you have been at that time in your life?

Dillard: Probably more moderate than I am today. Where you're at when you're twenty is very different than where you're at as the father of an eight-year-old- and a six-year-old daughter at age fifty-three, (laughter) so—

DePue: Got started at that late!

Dillard: It just… So I was probably like most people: I was more moderate. I hadn't given a lot of thought to abortion issues, gun control—I didn't even know what gun control was back then; I thought everybody hunted and fished, like my grandparents. Going to school in Macomb, handguns and handgun violence wasn't even on the radar screen, so… But I've become much more socially conservative as I get older, and actually attend church with much more thought on the theological side than I ever did when I was twenty years old.

DePue: You talked quite a bit about the influences in the classroom when you were at Western. How about in DePaul and law school?

Dillard: Law school at DePaul—great place, had a great time. Very difficult first-year professors. I did very well on contract law. I had a woman contract professor, Marlene Nicholson, who was a tremendous professor; but the first year of law school was sort of a blur. Second year, I could take electives like I wanted to. I could take evidence and I could start taking advanced criminal procedure, and I got mostly straight A's second and third year of law school no matter what I took. And again, it was a mix of school law, of local government law, and then other courses that would allow me to be a prosecutor. So I did okay the first year of law school and then did gangbusters years two and three and graduated pretty high in my law school class. And I stay much more active and closer to DePaul's law school today—I'm on their dean's advisory council or board—than I did when I was there.[9] I was a commuter, I wasn't living on campus, so I went home at night. That probably had a lot to do with it. But got a real solid education.

I was on contract with the Illinois state Senate, helping them on Chicago school finance matters my first, second and third year of law school. So I did work a little bit during the day on some things for the state Senate, which probably kept me from being more actively involved in law school extracurricular activities. I think I was paid, like, one thousand dollars a

[9] Dillard is a member of the DePaul University College of Law Dean's Council. The school also has a student-run Dean's Advisory Council.

month. I needed one thousand dollars a month to have a life as a law student. That's how I bought my books, that's how I fed myself, it's how I bought my five cups of coffee a day at Dunkin Donuts. (laughter) There was no Starbucks back in those days. That's how I occasionally might have gone out on a date.

But DePaul's law school—great place, great faculty. It's a better law school today. It's a very good, good, good law school today, an up and coming law school, and today it would be much harder to get in there than it was when I went; but a great law school with tremendous professors. One thing I will say about DePaul when I was there: I had two sitting [Illinois] supreme court justices my last year of law school. I had the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Dan Ward, for appellate technique. Dan Ward was the former Cook County state's attorney. He was the former dean of DePaul's law school, and I took appellate technique with fourteen students from the sitting Supreme Court chief justice in Illinois.

I love to tell the story—and it's how I recruit students to DePaul—that that was on a Friday; and I would leave DePaul, I would walk to the train, the Burlington Northern Metra train (Dan Ward lived in Westchester), and I would ride on a train with the chief justice of the supreme court, and we would talk. He didn't go to Harvard, he didn't go to Yale, he didn't go to the University of Illinois, he didn't go to Stanford—but there aren't many places where you're going to have the chief justice of the supreme court not only as your professor, but ride a commuter train home with that person. And that is a tremendous asset that a city law school like DePaul has.

In the mornings on Friday I had another Supreme Court justice, the former attorney general of Illinois, William G. Clark, for ethics. So every Friday I had two sitting Supreme Court justices in Illinois for class. I also had John Powers Crowley, a federal judge, teach me evidence. John Powers Crowley was one of the finest federal trial judges in Chicago history or midwestern history. He was my evidence professor. And then at nighttime on that Friday I had a former member of the Illinois House of Representatives, Anthony Scariano Sr., teach me school law.

Tony Scariano: I would have dinner with him before my local government class in this little restaurant in the basement of DePaul, and he and I remained friends. He became an appellate justice of the Illinois courts, and he would call me every now and then on legislation when I was a state Senator. He's sitting on the appellate court, and he'd say "Let's go to the Italian Village on Friday afternoon and bend spaghetti." (laughter)

Again, with all due respect to the finest law schools in this country, I don't think I'd get to go bend spaghetti with a justice of the Illinois appellate court who was my professor, ten years, twelve years down the road as a contemporary and a friend. You don't have a John Powers Crowley teaching you evidence as one of the great federal judges, and you don't have two

Supreme Court justices sitting teaching you classes. So DePaul University is in a world unto itself, I think, when it comes to the practicality of a city, urban law school; I wouldn't trade my degree from DePaul University for any law school in America. I'm lucky to be a partner at one of the great hundred law firms in the United States, and it's because of DePaul. It's not because of anything else.

DePue: You spent a few years as an intern, and then working on the staff down at Springfield. You come back and go to school at DePaul, in the heart of Chicago. During that timeframe, what, if anything, did you learn about Chicago-style machine politics?

Dillard: I remember the death of Harold Washington and the turmoil that came after Mayor Daley's death.[10] Being around Chicago, you get to watch Chicago TV and read books, and you get the feel of the late Mike Royko of the *Tribune*; while I was really focused on the law, it was good for me, the suburban kid, to be in the heart of Chicago. It made me a better legislator, made me a better top aide to Jim Thompson as his legislative director, and chief of staff for Governor Edgar, to be in the Loop every day as a law student and meet guys. All those guys I mentioned that I had were all Democrats—Bill Clark, Dan Ward, former Cook County state's attorney, dean of the law school, and Tony Scariano—

DePue: Some would say they were machine, or products of the machine.

Dillard: Yeah. Scariano was an independent, sort of Abner Mikva-type Democrat, so I got to see both kinds of Democrats. Each has their virtues, each has their downsides, (laughter) and so… When I would come back and work as a Senate contractual employee, I got to work with the current Mayor Daley; he was the state Senator then, very quiet, very nice man—not at all like the Mayor we see today who wears his heart on his sleeve. Mayor Daley then was a younger man. He lost his son—spina bifida, I believe was the cause of death—and Mayor Daley was a man who worked on mental health and developed mental disabilities issues and was a very quiet legislator. Dawn Clark Netsch, former state comptroller, somebody who really had a major hand in drafting Illinois' 1970 constitution—I thought she was neat. She was a law professor. I liked Dawn. I loved having… She was somebody who I could go to with deep questions about constitutionality, and while she was a liberal Democrat she was not a machine Democrat. And then I got to work with Harold Washington before he was mayor. Harold Washington was on the education committees of the state Senate, and I got to work with Mayor Washington when he was then state Senator Washington; so when he became mayor, I knew the mayor. It's sort of like President Obama—I knew President Obama when he was a state Senator—and then boom, Harold Washington's a

[10] Governor Edgar's first chief counsel, Arnie Kanter, had been involved in the selection of Eugene Sawyer as Washington's successor. Arnie Kanter, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 17, 2009, pp 32-33.

bigger-than-life mayor. Today, obviously President Obama is a bigger-than-life character, as well, in the world. It helped me to work with these people. So going to law school in the heart of urban Chicago at DePaul not only helped me legally, but it also helped me politically.

DePue: You have talked a little bit about that transition to start working on Gov. Jim Thompson's staff, but I want to get to that by asking you: As you're finishing up law school, what were your immediate thoughts for a career?

Dillard: Prosecutor, U.S. attorney's office; and then, lo and behold, a call comes out of the blue from John Washburn, who used to be the appropriations director in the state Senate before I went to law school and was now the director of legislative affairs for Gov. James R. Thompson. He said, "There's an opening for the liaison to the state Senate, and Kirk, I think you ought to consider doing this. Thompson's a great guy, it's a great career builder for you, you can always go off to a big law firm"—out of the blue. I think these discussions started over Thanksgiving weekend of my last year of law school; and then, as I explained earlier, that last semester of my last year of law school I was able to take classes from 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Friday and trial techniques on Saturday morning and make it work. But I could go be Jim Thompson's liaison to the state Senate, and I just deferred the Bar until the February Bar so that I could work. And you believe in fate—it's amazing how I was able to make that Friday schedule work so I could take that job with Jim Thompson. If I can't make that work I'm probably a bond lawyer or a prosecutor today! (laughter)

DePue: (laughter) But you would've been working in the Chicago area?

Dillard: I went and bought a place in Springfield, so I was over in Springfield. If the legislature was in, I was in Springfield during Monday through Thursday. If they weren't, I just sort of worked out of the Chicago office. Again, I'm still living in my parents' basement.

DePue: I was going to ask you—you've been cramming in a lot of activities during this timeframe. Apparently, one of them that you didn't figure out was the dating scene or the family scene, if I can put it that way.

Dillard: Right. I had, in law school, a nose to the grindstone. I had a couple of girlfriends, and I eventually spent a lot of time with Carol Crumbaugh who I eventually married in the mid-1980s. She's still a friend, but we're no longer married. She was in my law school class. She was from Leroy, Illinois, in McLean County. She's remarried—I just talked to her a week ago. We still remain good friends. Divorce is always tough. It's painful. We never had any children. She's remarried, I'm happily remarried, so I'm proud to say Carol's still my friend and we still stay in touch. But law school didn't have a lot of time for relationships. I was really busy, studying a lot. It's interesting, you ask about activities—DePaul basketball. In 1979, DePaul went to the Final

Four in basketball. My second and third years of law school we were 26-and-0, the number one team in America, and we lost in the first—

DePue: The coach at the time?

Dillard: Was Ray Meyer, who I idolized. But DePaul basketball was bigger-than-life. It was sort of like going to Duke University today, or the University of Kansas, and standing room only—had my season tickets, and my life revolved around DePaul basketball. I'd go see a lot of movies. I would go out with Carol, who eventually became my wife, and had one or two good friends, but that was basically it. Law school, to do it right, is really a full-time, full immersion endeavor; and I had that contract with the state Senate to work on Chicago school matters. Chicago schools were financially crumpling in those days, and I worked very closely with the late Senator Aldo DeAngelis from Olympia Fields, who was somebody who put together what is known as the Chicago School Finance Authority.[11] But law school was DePaul basketball, a few movies, going out to dinner with my eventual wife Carol, and studying.

DePue: What did you learn about Chicago's school financial crisis, if I can characterize it that way?

Dillard: I learned that, every fall—and it will never be this way if I'm lucky enough to be governor—people forget it was "Are they going to open or aren't they going to open?" every year, year after year after year. The State would advance them $80 million, $20 million, whatever they needed, and every year you never knew whether they were going to open or not, so we set up a School Finance Authority that really made them put forth a realistic budget. It helped with teacher union negotiations; it helped the school board from giving away the store to the unions when they couldn't afford it. And so we put together a better financial mechanism, more reliable, and there has not really been a threat of a Chicago… We brought stability to the public schools, and that was a good thing, but there was a time period for ten, twelve years that you never knew where the Chicago schools stood financially. They still have issues, but we're not talking about closing the schools down; and that was a really difficult time for the Chicago schools.

DePue: This is a timeframe where, between the two Daleys, we're in the timeframe of the Jane Byrnes and the Harold Washingtons; but as I recall, the mayor doesn't have much to do with establishing that budget or administering the schools?

Dillard: Correct, in that time period. Later on, around the time Jim Edgar first got elected—and we'll talk about that in subsequent interviews—

[11] Jim Edgar was a participant at the summit meeting Governor Thompson called in early 1980 to meet the Chicago funding crisis, out of which the Chicago School Finance Authority was born. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, 68-73.

DePue: Yeah, that's quite a way from that, early nineties.

Dillard: —but we instituted what we call Chicago school reform, which actually then gave Mayor Daley control of the Chicago public schools. And it works much better that Mayor Daley is in control of the public schools today, I would submit, than it was in the seventies and early eighties when you had chaos every year.

DePue: I keep going back here and asking more in depth questions. I really appreciate your taking the time to flesh things out for us, but you were working in the Thompson administration; so the inevitable question is, your first impressions of Jim Thompson?

Dillard: Bigger-than-life, unbelievably brilliant man; a tinge of arrogance that was a healthy arrogance—maybe it was confidence—and somebody who I thought was a great governor and a very good worker. But he was, as I think back on my career, one of the smartest people I've ever met intellectually; he was literally and figuratively a giant.

DePue: I'll put you on the spot here: would you rate him higher as a politician or as an administrator?

Dillard: He was a better politician than he was an administrator, although he was a good, solid governor with a good, solid administration. He didn't hold the fiscal reins as tight as we'll talk about Jim Edgar did, but different times. Things were different in the go-go-go-go-go 1980s as they were in the nineties or in today's environment. It was a much looser time. Just ask the Reagan administration. But Jim Thompson was a mythical character; he's still a mythical character today. When Jim Thompson walked into a room, there was an aura there, and I think that's good. Believe me, they knew that Jim Thompson was the Governor of Illinois. He was a bigger-than-life figure.

DePue: What was it about his personality and his character that made him such an effective politician?

Dillard: People knew that he was brilliant, that he was witty. He had a sense of humor, and he had an ability to get along with anybody. I remember a time when he met my grandmother at the state fair, and he said, "Hey, Granny, how are you? Can a governor have a kiss?" And he could go from that and then go back to the office and be in the most serious review of a prisoner's clemency petition, or go to sit down with Wall Street bankers. He had the ability just to feel comfortable in any setting, in any place in Illinois, and he had just this tremendous demeanor. When the sky was falling he would always keep his wits about him, and I think that's a great trait. He really had no temper. He never really had bad things to say about anybody. Jim Thompson had a demeanor that I still today try to emulate. I think it's a great gift to have that type of personality.

And the other thing that I took from Jim Thompson—if I'm ever lucky enough to be the governor of this state—is the guy enjoyed being governor; and not the trappings of the office and things like that, but he thoroughly enjoyed the people of Illinois—I don't care if it was a grade school kid or my grandmother, as I mentioned. The guy loved being the governor, and that made him a very effective leader. And he was an unabashed cheerleader for this state, which I thought was cool, including little stupid things like putting a black-eye war paint on his face at a U of I football game. No pretense about the guy, but again, could go from that to a meeting with the CEO of General Electric, talking about moving a plant or a factory to Illinois, and feel completely comfortable.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about his managerial style.

Dillard: Managerial style was he was clearly in control. He made all the decisions, but one thing that Jim Thompson did well is he had great people around him. He could attract the best and the brightest, from Arthur Quern, who was his chief of staff, to Jim Fletcher, who was his first chief of staff. Jim Fletcher was a Winston & Strawn lawyer/scholar from Northwestern University. You just look at the people that Thompson had: Dan Webb, the director of law enforcement; Ty Fahner—who went on to become the attorney general and run Mayer, Brown & Platt, one of America's largest law firms—as, again, the director of the state police; Jim Zagel, a great federal judge, as the director of revenue and the director of state police; Dr. Paula Wolff as his policy director; Dr. Robert Mandeville as the budget director. The list goes on and on. Jim Thompson attracted world class people to state government, as he did when he was the United States attorney in Illinois. And Thompson knew he was the brightest guy around; he was never threatened by any of these people, and his managerial style was to recruit the best and the brightest and let them run the government—and he did that very well.

DePue: But you mentioned that he was a better politician than an administrator.

Dillard: Yeah, he didn't spend as much time on the day-to-day micromanaging of the government as perhaps Governor Edgar did. Now, at times—there was a recession in the Thompson administration, actually a couple of them—

DePue: Especially early on, in the '81, '82, '83 timeframe.

Dillard: Thompson knew what was in his budget. And don't get me wrong; he knew that budget cold. He would have major press conferences with the media and never need any staff assistance on the budget. He knew that stuff cold, but he didn't agonize over day-to-day decisions. He let his cabinet make those decisions: Art Quern, the good staff that he had. I remember one time, when he was running against Adlai Stevenson in 1982, he said, "This is not your daddy's governor's office. A governor in the 1980s can't sit behind a desk. I've got to be out there championing jobs and business every day." And that's

what Thompson did best. He would be out of the office, and he'd trust impeccably these great people that he had around him to run the government on a daily basis.

DePue: One of the people who you didn't mention, I think—Jim Reilly was a chief of staff later on, of course. I mention him because he's also going to be in the Edgar administration.

Dillard: Correct. Jim Reilly—again, best and the brightest—University of Chicago Law grad. And the fourth chief of staff was John Washburn, who actually got me to go to work for the office of Jim Thompson. Thompson had four great chiefs of staff; all a little different than the one before, but all four guys were very, very smart guys. Jim Fletcher, Jim Reilly, Art Quern—those were really well educated men. John Washburn—incredibly smart guy but more street smart than perhaps the other guys. But Jim Reilly was Governor Thompson's legal counsel before he was his chief of staff. Jim Reilly was a superb person when it came to working with the legislature. Tough guy—had a temper, which was a good thing, because Jim Thompson was pretty laid back and Reilly could be the tough guy. Art Quern was more professorial. Nobody ever wanted to disappoint Art Quern. When you worked for Art Quern, while he was young, he was like your father: you didn't want to disappoint him, and you always had to be prepared because Art would have great questions to answer.

I never was there or worked for Jim Fletcher, although he's a friend now, but Fletcher had the toughest of all jobs: he was the first chief of staff, so he had to put together the governmental and sort of the political direction of the Thompson administration; and he teed it up from the start pretty doggone well.

DePue: Characteristic of a lot of these people—maybe you can correct me on this—but a pretty young group, too.

Dillard: Pretty young group; other than Dr. Mandeville they were young, but Jim Thompson was young at the time. But they were all really well-educated folks, and some had had experience—Art Quern had worked for Nelson Rockefeller in New York and Paula Wolff had worked for Governor Ogilvie, so they had some experiences as young people, but it was amazing. And I was a younger person in my twenties; I wouldn't say these people were intimidating, because they were very nice people, but I just look at them and go, Wow, will I ever be that smart? Will I ever be like that? Wow, can I ever write that well? No, it was the best and the brightest. It was sort of the Camelot era of Illinois state politics.

And then Thompson also had a group of people who were around him on the outside: Judge Joel Flaum, who's now an appellate justice, was one of his best friends, and at one time his next door neighbor; Samuel Skinner,

former United States attorney; the Dan Webbs of the world were around; a man named Dan Wild, who was a buddy of Thompson's who was a partner at Winston & Strawn; Mike Hasson, who has passed away, as did Danny Wild—both these guys are now no longer with us. But Thompson had a real good mix of friends on the outside, and that kept Thompson very level; they were all friends with Mrs. Thompson, as well. They were all social friends of the Thompsons; and boy, I never would go to dinner with these people, but I imagine their level of conversation at a dinner at the Greek Islands in Chicago was pretty cerebral.

In Chicago, Governor Thompson also had Ilana Rovner, who was a federal judge. Ilana was like a fairy godmother. She ran the Chicago office for Governor Thompson. She was married to a world renowned neurologist, Dr. Richard Rovner, from Northwestern University—and just an amazing group of people that Jim Thompson was able to attract.

DePue: You were a legislative liaison for Thompson for one year, and then you became the director, as I understand, in 1983?

Dillard: Yeah, I was the Senate liaison in 1982 for Governor Thompson, and I went back and worked the Senate where I had worked before. Then I became the director of legislative affairs, which is over both House and Senate, with a staff of—I had two people who lobbied the House and one who lobbied the Senate, and then I was in charge of all of the legislative people for every department of state government. I was a member of Jim Thompson's senior staff, which was my first entrée into working with the Jim Reillys and the Art Querns of the world.

DePue: Here's my question: how old are you in 1983?

Dillard: Young! (laughter)

DePue: You had been talking all along and giving us lots of different names and how impressed you were—

Dillard: In my late twenties!

DePue: —and you're in pretty rarefied air here, but you're one of the senior members of his staff when you become the director…

Dillard: I was probably the youngest of that group. There's two other people I should mention. David Gilbert was Jim Thompson's press secretary; one of his longest, probably one of his first two staffers. Dave Gilbert came from the *Chicago Tribune*—he's still a friend, I saw him yesterday—and Dave Gilbert was just a tough-as-nails press secretary for Jim Thompson, and quite a character unto himself. The other person was Greg Baise. Greg Baise is today the president of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association. Greg started off as a traveling aide to Governor Thompson—like a son to Jim Thompson—and

Greg eventually became the secretary of transportation. But in those days, Greg was in charge of personnel for all of the administration, and so your senior staff would be Greg Baise—kind of a gruff character although he's one of my (laughter) best friends—Dave Gilbert, who scared the heck out of me in those days, who's now a good friend.

In fact, I was just looking at some pictures. As I run for governor, I had to find a picture, a working picture of the Thompson administration—it's on my website. And I remember me—I had black hair; I was nice and skinny—and it's Jim Reilly, it's Paula Wolff. I remember these very deep meetings we'd have with the governor, including some really difficult budget times. But the beauty of Thompson was he'd let all these senior people speak; I'd sort of be there and he'd go, "What do you think, Mr. Dillard?" So if I was too quiet, he would extract what I was thinking, because I was the legislative guy, and the legislature obviously had its fingers in everything. So he would always seek out my input. I liked the way Thompson conducted meetings—sort of a Socratic law professor method, but always in charge, and he always asked great, great questions.

DePue: I've heard the stories about Thompson not being remiss and going out to actually walk the floor of the legislature and sit down next to these senators or representatives and use the charm on them. Did that make life more difficult or easier for you?

Dillard: Easier. Jim Thompson would go up to the floor of the House and Senate. He would do anything that you needed him to do.

DePue: Were you the one who was kind of guiding him in that process?

Dillard: Sometimes he would do it on his own. If I knew he was in the building, especially if it was in the late days of session, I'd have the trooper sort of tell me. "Will you call me and let me know if he's walking around the place" But being the legislative liaison for Jim Thompson was the easiest job in the world, because nobody could tell him no. He could turn anybody around by his charm and his intellect; you didn't see Jim Thompson lose too many things in front of the general assembly. I don't think Thompson hardly ever lost anything in front of the legislature. He was a master, and everybody loved him. Even if they hated his politics he could still melt them down and get them to do things; it didn't matter what the personality was of the legislator, Jim Thompson basically could turn them if he really had to have it. He'd sit there with that big 6'7" frame—sometimes if he was standing up he'd put his hands on the legislators' shoulders, and he'd be looking down at them—like a big grizzly bear would put his hands on your shoulders (laughter) right before he was able to eat you. Or he would sit down in the big red chairs in the state Senate, and he would swivel around, and he'd say to Senator Adeline Geo-Karis, "Geo, I need you; this is personal. Your governor needs this." It was very difficult to tell Jim Thompson no; he could persuade you and then he

could charm you, and it was a tremendous gift. He knew your district as a legislator as well as you did. I should have paid to have the job of being Jim Thompson's legislative director because it was fun to watch. He was his best legislative liaison. He didn't need me!

DePue: What you're describing sounds similar to the stories we often hear about Lyndon Johnson and getting the Johnson treatment, but there was a more sinister side to the Johnson treatment, as well, that I'm not hearing. Is that a fair assessment?

Dillard: There is not a mean bone in Jim Thompson's body. There's no sinister side to Jim Thompson. He was, I think, universally respected by everyone; as long as I worked for the man he never said anything negative about another person. He was such an upbeat human being, and an absolute joy to work for. And same with Mrs. Thompson—Jane Thompson treated the staff with such respect. I would always try to value Mrs. Thompson and Samantha Thompson's time.

I would try not to bother the Thompsons. Now that I'm older and I've got an eight year old and a six year old and I know how stressful it is as a state Senator—well, it's one hundred times more stressful as a governor. I just pick up little glimpses of it, as I'm a candidate here in my first few months for governor, of the precious time you have with your wife and kids. I would always respect the Thompsons' time and would check things out with Mrs. Thompson before I'd ask to have time, because I wanted to let the Thompsons have their own personal family time. I just thought that was important—and I learned it with the Edgars—the first lady is extremely important, and some staff forget that the first lady is the partner of the governor. You want to keep the first lady on your side, and you want to respect the first family's time, privacy; and it really helps to have a good relationship with either Jane Thompson or, later on, Brenda Edgar.

DePue: How much time did Thompson spend in Springfield, versus Chicago?

Dillard: The early years Thompson was basically almost all Springfield. He had a place on Fullerton Parkway by DePaul University that he loved, and he would be in Chicago a couple of days a week, but he was at the mansion for the early years. Then later on as Samantha got older, he got a place on Clarendon and Hutchinson in Chicago and spent the lion's share of his time in Chicago. He wanted Samantha, his daughter, to be raised in a normal environment. When you push a zero on a telephone and a butler brings you Oreo cookies and a Coca Cola or milk, that's not a real existence; as Samantha got older the Thompsons said, "We've got to get her out of here and let her have a lot more normal life."

DePue: "Get her out of here," being the mansion.

Dillard: Meaning the mansion. It's not a real existence. You have to understand she was born into the mansion, so it wasn't as if she had any other frame of reference and a life other than people were there to wait on you. It's not like the White House. The living quarters of the governor's mansion are nothing more than an apartment. Even though you've got this beautiful home around you, your living quarters aren't great; but you do have staff. And it's a sterile environment. There's state police around. I don't blame the Thompsons one iota for saying, "We've got to get Samantha into a regular house where she can have kids from the neighborhood come over." There's still a guard and the state police, but it's different to have your own home than to live in the governor's mansion. So all the early years were Springfield.

But Thompson, even when he lived in Chicago in the last few years, loved staying at the mansion, and he would still have people and visitors down. He loved overnighting there, and I think Jim and Jane Thompson—especially Jim Thompson, with his love of history and antiques—loved that governor's mansion. He goes back there to stay every now and then, and I bet you he knows every nook, cranny, and nodule in the walls at that place.

DePue: It's awfully tempting to do a quick comparison between Jim Thompson's use of the mansion versus Jim Edgar's use of the mansion. Now hold off on the second part but talk about the first.

Dillard: Jim Thompson would use that mansion effectively for big meetings. He'd have summit meetings in what is a replica of the East Room of the White House. I remember one time when he had a large labor union gathering on the lawn, and they had beer kegs and got all these union guys. I went back over to the State Capitol, and the Senate president, James Pate Philip, was just furious. "He's got all these labor guys over there and they're drinking beer, and I bet you they don't have porta-potties out there; I don't know what they're doing!" But Thompson used the mansion for getting important legislation passed. He knew how to use the mansion as a tool, but importantly, he knew it would belong to the people; and that's why he would have a carpenter or an electrician come over, and he would have a big party each year with the Greek community, and he'd have a Seder dinner for the Jewish community.

The Greek parties were infamous. They were outside, and they'd be cooking lambs, and you'd have a lot of Greeks from around the state come over. It was usually toward the end of session, so Thompson would have this huge party, and he'd be using it to work. I'd give him a list and say, "Now you need to talk to these six legislators tonight, Governor. This is who you've got to go get. We need these people." He was a master at just doing that, and he loved doing that. I think it was part of the fabric of the job. He would say, "Hey, Representative, come on over here," and he'd take him off under the balcony. I'd watch him, and I'd be kind of laughing inside watching him sort

of work this state rep or state senator over; he'd come over and say "He'll be there, he'll be there, he'll be there." (laughter)

So the governor knew how to use the mansion, and he was very cognizant that it belonged to the public. He would let different groups—Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, whoever—use it; the mansion was alive under the Thompsons. He set up a fund where private money came into a foundation to help support the place. He was into the history of it. He had a curator, who is still there today, David Borland, take great care of the Executive Mansion. The mansion and Jim Thompson go together like a hand in glove, and I think that's still true today.

DePue: You've talked a lot about his relationship with the legislature, and we've talked about some of the key staff people, but we haven't much talked about the press yet—his relationship with the press and your function in that relationship.

Dillard: Jim Thompson was masterful with the press. I think he thought it was a cat and mouse game, and he loved it. He probably missed having jury trials, especially in the early years, so the press was sort of his ability to make the case to a jury, which is the people, and he was pretty accessible to the press. He loved banter back and forth. There were one or two press people, mostly columnists, that he didn't always like, but he was pretty good.

Mike Flannery, the CBS-2 reporter in Chicago, was in a bicycle accident one time, and I remember Governor Thompson going to visit Mike in the hospital. And he didn't do that for political reasons; he did it because he liked Mike Flannery, he respected Mike Flannery, and he viewed the press as part of the state government family.

He was incredibly generous with his time to the media, and really accessible. He gave them plenty to write about in a good sense, whether it was going down the big slide at the state fair on a burlap bag with his daughter; or letting them photograph him eating a corn dog; or riding a horse—as he did one time—around the third floor of the rotunda in the Capitol. Jim Thompson gave these reporters lots to cover, which I think in turn allows reporters to have a bigger place in their newspaper, a stature in their newspaper—has their editors, if they're out-of-town newspapers, say "What's going on in the Capitol?" It will let those reporters get more print space or more airtime, and I think reporters like that; and I think reporters probably had fun covering the Thompsons and the Thompson family. Different era but a very special man, and a man who knew that he had a complete mastery of state government. So there was nothing a reporter could ask him that was really going to trick him up.

DePue: How much of some of those things that you're talking about—riding the horse, going down the giant slide, the sometimes outrageous costumes that he

might wear on the campaign trail—how much of that was an act versus that's just who Jim Thompson was?

Dillard: That was just who Jim Thompson was. The first time I really saw Jim Thompson, I remember he had on an orange t-shirt. He was still really skinny. He was young. He had blue jeans on, a little gawky, a little… But he was who he was, he felt completely comfortable in whatever he did, and I don't think much of it was an act. The guy truly was a bigger-than-life character.

DePue: In terms of his relationship with the press, was it advantageous for him that he wasn't Dan Walker?

Dillard: Probably. I am a little bit too young to remember much of Dan Walker, but my guess is the confrontational era of Dan Walker—Jim Thompson was a breath of fresh air coming in. And probably not unlike Rod Blagojevich being succeeded by Pat Quinn, although Thompson is a much more gregarious person than Governor Quinn is, as we sit here today. But Thompson was good for showbiz. When he was the United States attorney in Chicago—I was in law school—he was a bigger-than-life character as a United States attorney back then. Obviously, to be governor of Illinois you've got to have an ego, you've got to know that it's show business from time to time. But Thompson was completely comfortable in his own skin; and while he might ratchet it up and obviously set up photo opportunities and things like that, it really wasn't completely hokey. He was very comfortable doing it, and he was himself, and there was plenty to cover naturally as himself.

DePue: Did you get involved very much on the political side? He had a campaign in '82, about the time you would've gotten there, and of course that was a very tough race with Adlai Stevenson III; and then '86, of course, which was the LaRouchie[12] years.

Dillard: Right. I really didn't get involved that much on the real campaign side. I would work legislators, I'd make sure legislators helped the Thompson campaign, but the campaign's not what I did. I did help with the recount, like everybody; it was all hands on deck during the recount on 1982. I remember going to Rock Island and Alton and all over the place doing a recount. I remember buying a bunch of white shirts at Marshall Field's—I was living in Springfield in those days—buying a bunch of white shirts and staying in hotels—and didn't have any more underwear—as day after day after day we did the recounting stuff in Chicago.

DePue: Time to change gears here and talk about some of the legislative initiatives that you were, I'm sure, up to your neck with, with Thompson, during those years that you served as his director of legislative affairs. I've got a couple

[12] Lyndon LaRouche was a highly controversial political figure who garnered a number of followers who became known as LaRouchies. His theories faded quickly.

listed here but let's start with just asking you, what are the battles that stick out most clearly in your mind?

Dillard: A program called Build Illinois where we had major infrastructure improvements in the state. I remember in 1981, 1982—tough economic times, budget crises—really spending unbelievable amounts of time trying to manage the state budget; lot of late-night meetings, especially on Sundays, at the old Bismarck Hotel, which was downtown Chicago at Randolph and I guess it's Wells Street. I just remember that we would have Sunday night meetings there and we'd have food catered in; literally we'd work till midnight trying to get the state's budget to balance in tough economic times.

In 1983 we had a temporary tax increase, which helped me immensely when I was Governor Edgar's chief of staff; to watch how Governor Thompson went about having a temporary income tax increase to get us through a very difficult time; how Governor Thompson would go around the state to various interest groups and make pitches for it; and how he worked and lobbied legislators. But the temporary income tax in 1983 was very tough. I was just leaving, but I came back to watch a gentleman named Zack Stamp be the legislative director when the Comiskey Park ballpark was rebuilt in Chicago, and we set it up as a state sports facilities authority. There were some great legislative times with Governor Thompson. Every year, we would have pretty major legislation, capital programs out there, but he was a master at working the legislature.

DePue: Put you on the spot here, because I'd like to have you, if you can, flesh out one or two of these battles a little bit more in terms of the give and take; working with the legislative leaders. Let's start with that 1983 temporary income tax. That would have been one of your earliest campaigns, if you will.

Dillard: It was, and I think I was in the Senate liaison still, so I was not the director of legislative affairs. Greg Baise was sort of put in charge of the whole effort, and Greg was the person who orchestrated all of the different interest groups, Thompson's speeches, appearances, and everything else. We had a running roll call of where we thought legislators would be, including trying to figure out everything in everybody's district that might be jeopardized if the state really had financial issues or crises. An amazingly well run operation, and Governor Thompson met with virtually every member of the legislature.

We would bring people down *ad nauseam* to see him in his office, and I'd say, "Governor, we're going to bring these three members down," and he was always a trooper. He'd roll his eyes every now and then, but he would sit there and listen to every sob story and every need of every legislator; some of these meetings were laborious and painful, and he would see everybody. I remember one meeting with Sen. Margaret Smith. He brought Margaret Smith down, and Margaret Smith wanted to talk about having an oil painting for her husband—the late Fred Smith, who was the dean of the state Senate—hang

somewhere in the Capitol building. And good-natured Jim Thompson would say, "You know, you're right. We ought to have a picture of an African American someplace, Margaret, in this building; and let me figure out where it would go and how do we get that done." And there were times when I would laugh with him and say, "Governor, from 2:00-4:00 this afternoon"— I call it stray cats and dogs day—"you're going to have to see an eclectic group of members here, and here's…" And he'd laugh and go "Ooh…"

But he would never complain, and he would just sort of say, "Give me five minutes. I want to call Jane." He would always make time to call Mrs. Thompson, which is something I learned from Jim Thompson and I admire; and I need to do it more myself. Every now and then he would just say, "I haven't talked to my wife today," and he would just want five, ten minutes alone to call Mrs. Thompson. I'd go out, and I'd close the door to give him privacy, but it would always be "Hey honey, how ya doing?" A very good trait. I learned that, and I could take lessons from a guy like Jim Thompson. He's been married to the same woman for a number of years, and there's a reason for it; he always had his priorities right.

But during that 1983 temporary tax, he had a lot of meetings with the legislative leaders; a lot of diplomacy where he'd be bouncing back with the two Republican leaders, and sometimes the two Democrat leaders; and *ad nauseam* meetings with the legislative leaders and their staffs. Takes a lot of work to pass an income tax increase in the state of Illinois, a state like this, and it took thousands and thousands of hours to put it together.

DePue: Most of this time there are just four or five legislative leaders who dominated what was going on in the legislature, and so much of the story of Illinois politics is about the Four Tops and the power that they wield. So let's start with this: why is it that, in Illinois politics, the four legislative leaders dominate what happens in the legislature?

Dillard: I'd say a lot of their power started in 1983. Legislative leaders have always been powerful and important, and you had real powerful ones like Russ Arrington before my time. But you had, in '83, Phil Rock—great Senate president, brilliant man, tough, hard-nosed guy; but always respected Jim Thompson and generally would be—I think people would say—Jim Thompson's major ally of the four legislative leaders. Because Phil—

DePue: A Democrat.

Dillard: A Democrat, former Democratic Party chairman. But basically, Phil Rock wanted to do what was right for the State of Illinois, and Phil could take heat, he was a tough guy. Speaker Madigan was just coming into his real—he was a powerful guy then, too, but he was really coming into his power. Thompson had a good relationship with Speaker Madigan, and Thompson was very good at also making sure that Mrs. Madigan, Shirley Madigan—who Thompson

knew before she married the Speaker—was always around. I think Jim Thompson thought that it was important to have a relationship socially with the Speaker and his wife, as well. Lee Daniels was a new, upcoming leader, a very smart tactician. Lee was the Republican leader. Lee wanted to make a name for himself, which made it a little harder for Jim Thompson to corral him and reel him in. (laughter) And then there was James Pate Philip, the Senate president.

DePue: DuPage County.

Dillard: DuPage County, the leader of DuPage… Cigar-smoking ex-Marine—or Marine; you're never an ex-Marine. He was a Marine, cigar-smoking, tough guy. One of the things that always made Pate so difficult to work with is, Pate never wanted anything. He just wanted to go home. There's nothing that he wanted. DuPage County in those days was an affluent place. It didn't need much, although later on it needed some infrastructure things. It needed some flood control relief because it had flooding from Salt Creek and other places, and it needed to have roads widened as it grew. So later on you could engage Pate a little more in the need to do some things governmentally. But Pate Philip: basically he didn't want anything. Constituents in DuPage County didn't have prisons and they didn't have state universities; and much tougher to get his arms around, but—

DePue: But he would be opposed to Chicago getting more than their share, I would imagine.

Dillard: Jim Thompson liked Chicago, had a good relationship with the mayors of Chicago, and Pate was not exactly your biggest friend to Chicago. Then you also had the undercurrent of Lee Daniels and Pate Philip: while they were allies, they were [also] like an older brother and a younger brother, and sometimes they didn't always get along. I wouldn't say jealousy was there, but they just had different styles and different agendas, even though they represented the same towns, because Lee's House district was part of Pate's Senate district. So that was always interesting for me, to have to walk on a fine line.

DePue: Now the four you've discussed so far—it sounds like Phil Rock was his best ally, and Phil Rock is a Democrat, again.

Dillard: Right, of the four legislative leaders, Phil Rock was the easiest for us to get along with. No BS, and he would never lead you astray. And to his credit, Speaker Madigan never lies to you; Speaker Madigan is just a little more coy, and sometimes you don't know where he's coming from, but the Speaker was always honest with us, as well.[13] All four of these guys were generally brutally honest, (laughter) but they all had different styles.

[13] Madigan also appreciated honesty from others, as Edgar realized. Jim Edgar, June 10, 2009, 39-40.

The one good thing, if I'm ever governor of this state, is I watched Jim Thompson, as later I watched Jim Edgar, work these different legislative leaders, and it's a balancing act. You see them alone, you see them sometimes with their chief of staff. You see the two Senate leaders, you see the two House leaders. Do you go to their leadership meetings? Do you go to their full caucuses? Thompson would go to full caucuses, especially of the Republicans, where Governor Edgar really wouldn't do that very often. Again, Thompson would go on the physical floors of the House and Senate. Jim Edgar would never go on the physical floors because of his belief in the separation of powers. So everybody's got their own style, but the real Four Tops, as we know it, around 1983 really started to evolve; and the constant has been Speaker Madigan, but Pate Philip was there for a long time. But starting in this 1983 era is when these four legislative leaders really amassed lots of power.

DePue: What happened in '83? Or what was it about that year that caused that consolidation of power?

Dillard: Lots of time where you had summit meetings with Jim Thompson and these four legislative leaders over the temporary income tax, *ad nauseam* meetings, with the press hanging out in the rotunda. And it's really where the appropriations chairmen were not—they're still important—but the budgetary power really then got sucked to the four legislative leaders. It was just the amount of time, and people just got used to seeing the four legislative leaders and the governor deciding all of these things.

DePue: Thinking back to my history of that timeframe, 1980 was the cumulative voting—Quinn's initiative—so 1983 would have been the time when the old cumulative voting practice would have ended, as well.[14] Was that part of the equation?

Dillard: I clearly think that getting rid of cumulative voting concentrated more power in the legislative leaders. It was very healthy to have the opposite view in Chicago and in suburbia by the Democrats and Republicans, respectively; and I think getting rid of cumulative voting helped, in a small way, give the legislative leaders more power, because they have a more homogenous caucus or chamber, as opposed to the old days when you had some wild cards that were out there.

DePue: We probably should explain very briefly, if somebody encounters this and didn't know about the old style cumulative voting, what's going on with that. So I'll ask you to explain that, and then you can weigh in with your opinion about whether it was good or bad that we ended that practice.

[14] In 1980, Illinois voters approved the Cutback Amendment 2,112,224 to 962,325; a margin of 1,149,899 votes. http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lrb/conampro.htm. The amendment did away with cumulative voting and multimember House districts, reducing the number of representatives from 177 to 118.

Dillard: Cumulative voting was where you really had three House members from one senatorial district as opposed to two today, so it really guaranteed that you'd always have one member of the minority party representing an area of the state. Out here where we're sitting today in Naperville, you would have a liberal Democrat. A guy named J. Glenn Schneider represented conservative DuPage County. In the city of Chicago you would have a Republican who would represent an inner city district. Some were African American in Chicago. So it was really healthy to have that extra viewpoint. Made for less partisanship. Out here, when I sit out in Naperville, I couldn't demagogue much, because I still have a loyal opposition who the *Naperville Sun* newspaper would go to and say, "Hey, Mr. Democrat, what do you think about this?" Same in the city of Chicago. So cumulative voting was sold as a way to cut expenses, I guess, and the state's got a big budget; so we lost a third of the legislature's size, but it really hasn't saved much money. We have more staffers. I think the legislative budgets are way up. But we lost this more bipartisan relationship that we had. Minority parties lost their influence in certain areas, and if you sit out in DuPage County, you're all represented by Republicans. If you're in the city of Chicago, you're essentially represented by all Democrats. I think that minority viewpoint was healthy, and I think the legislature worked better back then. And I think there's a lot of reasons why the four legislative leaders, before Thompson, amassed all this power, but I do think cumulative voting is just one of a number of smaller reasons why the Four Tops are more powerful today than before.

DePue: Let's talk about the Build Illinois project, because you said that was one of the more significant legislative initiatives that Thompson had while you were there as his director.

Dillard: Build Illinois was just a massive public works infrastructure program. It had a cute name, Build Illinois—and there was, later on, a Build Illinois II—but it was just a way to get a major capital bill passed.[15] Governor Thompson, rightfully so, thought that infrastructure—roads, bridges, mass transportation, university buildings—were all part of an ability to connect private sector jobs.

DePue: I heard something buzz back there. Do you need to check that out?

Dillard: Sure, let me see what… (pause in recording)

DePue: We took a very brief break here, and the senator and I agreed to give him an opportunity to do a little bit of research on Build Illinois so we can talk the specifics a little bit better. But we're already at two hours. It was a very fast two hours, and we covered an awful lot of territory; but we still have the end of the Thompson years, then going into private practice, and then obviously the main focus next time is going to be on Jim Edgar.

[15] See Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki [get cite after Brown final edit].

Dillard: Right. One thing, Mark, as we do this, that I will take a look at before we begin our next session: there is a blue book called *The Thompson Record* that was put together at the end of the James Thompson years, and it's a great compilation of fourteen years of Jim Thompson's record. I'm going to take a peek at it and look at the Build Illinois part, but there's just different chapters on the Thompson years,—and the Edgar record, which we put together. But this is a book, and I'll take a peek at it; it's out there as a record.

DePue: Yeah, I've got the equivalent of the Edgar years. I've never seen the one that covers the Thompson years, and I need to be seeing that.

Dillard: I'll bring it in.

DePue: That would be great.

Dillard: Yeah, *Meeting the Challenge: The Edgar Administration*—very similar book.[16] In fact, we probably… There's no pride of authorship in state government. (laughter) I'll steal ideas, if I'm the governor of Illinois, from the governor of Indiana. My guess is that we in the Edgar administration looked at *The Thompson Record*, because the two books physically sort of look alike.

DePue: Let's finish with this comment here—I rarely make an editorial comment—but you've had the privilege of working with Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar—incredible differences in personal style between those two, but it seems like you have a great amount of pride in working for both of those gentlemen.

Dillard: There is no doubt when you look at the governors of Illinois that Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar are among the greatest governors this state's ever had; and we've had some good ones, but Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar, in my estimation, are among the top five governors this state has ever had. They had very different styles, very different upbringings, and, so much like American history, each served an era well with their style. Ronald Reagan's style might not have always worked in a certain time, and Franklin Roosevelt's style might not have worked at a certain time; but Jim Edgar and Jim Thompson, very different guys, served their eras very well, and I think they helped set the tone for their eras. But as I know, my limited knowledge of state government—but I am an aficionado of governors—I'd put Jim Edgar and Jim Thompson in the top five governors this state's ever had.

DePue: I think that's a great place to finish for today. Thanks very much, Senator.

Dillard: Thank you.

(end of interview)

[16] Tom Schafer, *Meeting the Challenge: the Edgar Administration, 1991-1999* (Springfield, IL: State of Illinois, Office of the Governor, 1998).